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LifeAdviser Special Edition

A Balanced Living Special Edition Newsletter

CONCERN has prepared this special edition newsletter devoted to helping you and your family members understand the possible impact of and how to cope with the coordinated terrorist attacks in Paris. Exposure to accounts of traumatic events can be overwhelming to parents, children and the community as a whole. While it may not affect you directly, a terrorist attack can undermine our sense of safety and security at home, at work, and wherever we find ourselves – in the biggest cities or the smallest towns.

This article from the American Psychological Association (APA) focuses on coping with terrorism whether one is a direct victim of an attack, a survivor of a past traumatic event, or indirectly exposed to the event through the mass communication channels that are repeating images and videos of the aftermath. The article also has specific tips for helping children cope.

Professional Help Is Available

If you are an employee or eligible dependent of an organization contracting with CONCERN: EAP and need additional assistance for emotional support and finding local resources, you can request counseling and work/life services by phoning (800) 344-4222, answered live 24/7.

Paris: Emotional Reaction to Terrorism



Managing traumatic stress: Coping with terrorism

Terrorism threatens a society by instilling fear and helplessness in its citizens. It seeks to hold a society or government hostage by fear of destruction and harm.

When terrorist acts occur, people generally look for ways to cope with the acute stress and trauma. Terrorism evokes a fundamental fear of helplessness. The violent actions are random, unprovoked and intentional, and often are targeted at defenseless citizens. Trying to cope with the irrational information that is beyond normal comprehension can set off a chain of psychological events culminating in feelings of fear, helplessness, vulnerability and grief.

Who is affected?

After a terrorist attack, many people are impacted. People who have experienced the trauma often fall into the following categories:

- Survivors of past traumatic events (e.g., refugees of wars, terrorism or torture, and survivors of domestic violence, child abuse or street crime). These individuals may have a heightened sense of vulnerability.
- People who personally witnessed or were victims of the terrorist attack.
- People who experience traumatization from learning of relatives, friends and acquaintances who were subject to the violence, or from exposure to repeated media accounts of the trauma.

What you may experience following a terrorist attack

People who have experienced or witnessed a terrorist attack may go into a state of acute stress reaction. You may feel one or all of these symptoms:

- Recurring thoughts of the incident
- Becoming afraid of everything, not leaving the house or isolating yourself
- Stopping usual functioning, no longer maintaining daily routines
- Survivor guilt — "Why did I survive? I should have done something more."
- Tremendous sense of loss
- Reluctance to express your feelings, losing a sense of control over your life

Coping with the trauma

1. Identify the feelings that you may be experiencing. Understand that your feelings are a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.
2. Remember that you have overcome adversity and trauma in the past. Try to remember what you did that helped you overcome the fear and helplessness in that situation.
3. Talk to others about your fears. It's OK to ask for help. Workplaces may convene small groups with an EAP counselor or other mental health counselor so people can share feelings.
4. Make efforts to maintain your usual routine.
5. Think positively. Realize that things will get better. Be realistic about the time it takes to feel better.
6. Recognize that the nature of terrorist attacks creates fear and uncertainty about the future. Continue to do the things in your life that you enjoy. Don't get preoccupied with the things you cannot control to the extent that they prevent you from living your normal life.
7. Know the actions our government is taking to combat terrorism and restore safety and security. Recognize that trained officials throughout the country are mobilized to prevent, prepare for and respond to terrorist attacks.
8. Limit exposure to media coverage.
9. Tips for helping children cope:
    - Encourage children to say how they are feeling about the event.
    - Ask children what they have seen, heard or experienced.
    - Assure children that their parents are taking care of them and will continue to help them deal with anything that makes them feel afraid.
    - Help children recognize when they have shown courage in meeting a new scary situation and accomplished a goal despite hardship or barriers. Instill a sense of empowerment.
    - Let children know that institutions of democracy are still in place and our government is intact. (It can also be helpful for adults to realize this.)
    - Know that it is possible for children to experience vicariously the traumatization from the terrorist attack (e.g. watching TV coverage, overhearing adult conversations).

This Special Edition newsletter is intended for informational purposes only, and should not be used to replace professional advice. If you are an employee or eligible dependent of an organization contracting with CONCERN: EAP and need additional assistance for emotional support and finding local resources, you can request counseling and work/life services by phoning (800) 344-4222, answered live 24/7.

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